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[http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/republic-services-commits-to-build-firebreak-at-bridgeton-landfill/article\\_cba4b0dd-4afc-5259-8985-6f8b740c85af.html](http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/republic-services-commits-to-build-firebreak-at-bridgeton-landfill/article_cba4b0dd-4afc-5259-8985-6f8b740c85af.html)

The owner of a north St. Louis County landfill is declaring trench warfare on a waste fire that's been burning deep underground for almost three years to ensure it doesn't reach World War II era radioactive waste buried nearby.

In a surprise move, Republic Services Inc. said it is moving ahead with plans to build a fire break, a trench filled with soil or clay, that will protect the adjacent West Lake Landfill Superfund site in case the underground fire continues to expand north.

There have been talks about building some type of physical barrier in the landfill since the fire intensified last year. And Republic Services submitted plans for a firebreak this summer under an agreement with Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster.

The legal agreement, which stems from a March lawsuit, doesn't require Republic to take action yet, given current conditions. In fact, the company insists current efforts to contain the fire — rows of gas "interceptor wells" and a cap across the southern half of the landfill — have been effective. But it decided to move forward anyway.

"Even though we don't think there is a driving technical need right now for the wall, we see a benefit of certainty," said Richard Callow, a landfill spokesman.

In addition to the barrier, Republic will move ahead with other work outlined in contingency plans that were submitted to the state, including an expansion of the gas collection system in the northern half of the landfill and capping the remainder of the site to contain odors.

While Republic knows its plans won't satisfy critics who will continue to push for removal of radioactive waste at West Lake, the company hopes it will bring at least some measure of relief to neighbors, fire officials and regulators, who had to acknowledge the possibility that the mass of hot waste would come in contact with nuclear material.

The company said its plans aren't a result of public pressure.

But after a year of constant deadlines and demands from regulators and politicians, the decision to go ahead is a way for the company to get out in front of a problem that's had landfill managers scrambling to play catch-up for more than a year.

"We think this provides an ultimate certainty and resolution that frankly may be of more value right now than the potential savings of waiting and seeing if it never gets triggered," Callow said.

The barrier, or firebreak, will reach 30 to 50 feet below ground to bedrock. It will be back-filled with soil, clay or another inert material and stretch the entire width of the landfill starting at the fence line along St. Charles Rock Road.

The exact specifications and location have yet to be determined, but Republic plans to build the barrier within the boundaries of the West Lake Landfill.

Chris Whitley, a spokesman for EPA's regional office, said Republic has not provided a detailed proposal for construction of an isolation barrier. But he said the agency is pleased the company has agreed to take "proactive steps" to ensure the situation at the Bridgeton Landfill doesn't threaten the radiation-contaminated material at West Lake.

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